

CHAPTER

2

Assessment *for* and *of* Learning

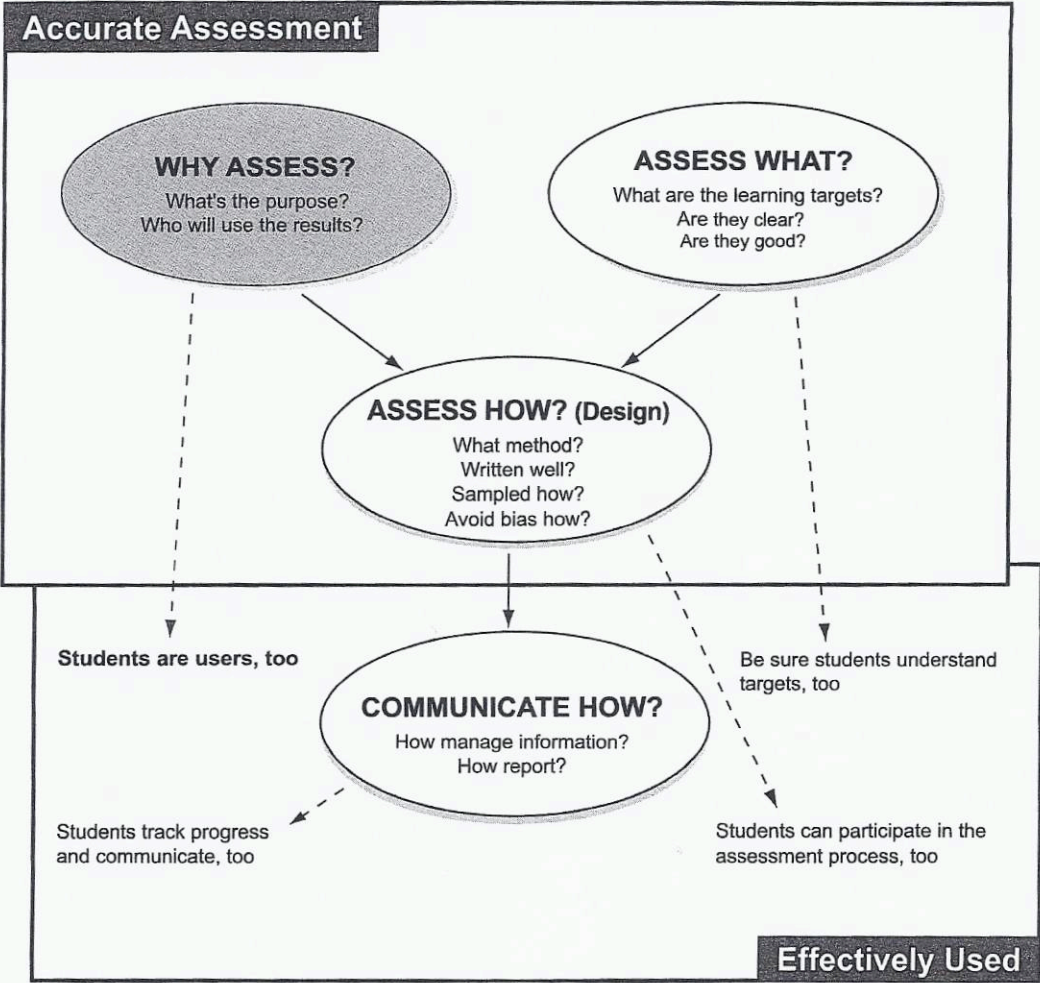
Self-assessment by pupils, far from being a luxury, is in fact an essential component of formative assessment. (Black & Wiliam, 1998)

Many people want to use assessment information, and they want to use it in many ways. Some wish to help students learn more, as when Ms. Weathersby uses writing rubrics in her English classes. Others wish to track student progress toward important learning outcomes, to decide where to allocate resources, to check which adoptions are most effective, to provide accountability information to the public, or to refer students for special services.

We can think of all assessment uses as falling into one of two general categories—assessments *FOR* learning and assessments *OF* learning. Both categories have their place in education and in the classroom—you’ve been doing both for years. What is perhaps new is an expanded understanding of the roles each should play to maximize student achievement while minimizing unintended negative consequences and side effects for students.

The goal of this chapter is to elaborate the differences and similarities between assessment *for* and *of* learning, relate them to student motivation and learning, and provide an organizing framework for assessment *for* learning in the classroom. In our discussion, we will concentrate on the shaded portions of Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Keys to Quality Classroom Assessment



What We Mean by Assessment *for* and *of* Learning

Table 2.2 shows *our* summary of the key differences between assessment *for* and *of* learning. Assessments *of* learning are those assessments that happen after learning is supposed to have occurred to determine if it did. They are used to make statements of student learning status at a point in time to those outside the classroom, as when making student referrals or making decisions about programs. State assessments, local standardized tests, and college admissions tests represent external examinations that do this. But we also conduct assessments *of* learning within the classroom when we gather evidence to determine a student's report card grade. Unit final exams and important projects often serve this purpose.

Assessments *for* learning happen while learning is still underway. These are the assessments that we conduct throughout teaching and learning to diagnose student needs, plan our next steps in instruction, provide students with feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work, and help students see and feel in control of their journey to success. Each one reveals to students increments of achievement and how to do better the next time. On these occasions, the grading function is laid aside. This is not about accountability—those are assessments *of* learning. This is about getting better.

DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

Activity 2.1 Introduction to Assessment *for* Learning

Please watch the video clip on the accompanying DVD entitled “Assessment OF/ FOR Learning: A Hopeful Vision of the Future.” This clip shows Rick explaining the important distinctions between assessment *for* and *of* learning. While you are listening, please complete the form in Table 2.1 to track the differences. A printable version of Table 2.1 appears on the CD.

Table 2.1 Assessment *for* and *of* Learning: Selected Key Differences

	Assessment <i>for</i> Learning	Assessment <i>of</i> Learning
Reasons for Assessing		
Audience for Results		
Focus of Assessment— Learning Targets		
Place in Time		
Primary Users		
Typical Uses		
Teacher's Role		
Student's Role		
Primary Motivator for Students		
Example(s)		

State in your own words why the distinction between assessment *for* and *of* learning is important:

Table 2.2 Comparing Assessment *for* and *of* Learning: Overview of Key Differences

	Assessment <i>for</i> Learning	Assessment <i>of</i> Learning
Reasons for Assessing	Promote increases in achievement to help students meet more standards; support ongoing student growth; improvement	Document individual or group achievement or mastery of standards; measure achievement status at a point in time for purposes of reporting; accountability
Audience	Students about themselves	Others about students
Focus of Assessment	Specific achievement targets selected by teachers that enable students to build toward standards	Achievement standards for which schools, teachers, and students are held accountable
Place in Time	A process during learning	An event after learning
Primary Users	Students, teachers, parents	Policy makers, program planners, supervisors, teachers, students, parents
Typical Uses	Provide students with insight to improve achievement; help teachers diagnose and respond to student needs; help parents see progress over time; help parents support learning	Certify student competence; sort students according to achievement; promotion and graduation decisions; grading
Teacher's Role	Transform standards into classroom targets; inform students of targets; build assessments; adjust instruction based on results; offer descriptive feedback to students; involve students in assessment	Administer the test carefully to ensure accuracy and comparability of results; use results to help students meet standards; interpret results for parents; build assessments for report card grading
Student's Role	Self-assess and keep track of progress; contribute to setting goals; act on classroom assessment results to be able to do better next time	Study to meet standards; take the test; strive for the highest possible score; avoid failure
Primary Motivator	Belief that success in learning is achievable	Threat of punishment, promise of rewards
Examples	Using rubrics with students; student self-assessment; descriptive feedback to students	Achievement tests; final exams; placement tests; short cycle assessments

Source: Adapted from *Understanding School Assessment* (pp. 17–18), by J. Chappuis & S. Chappuis, 2002, Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute. Copyright © 2006, 2002 Educational Testing Service. Adapted by permission.

A useful way to think practically about assessment *for* learning strategies that transform the assessment environment in the classroom comes from Royce Sadler, an Australian researcher:

A key premise is that for students to be able to improve, they must have the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production. This in turn requires that students:

- *Know what high quality work looks like*
- *Be able to objectively compare their work to the standard*
- *Have a store of tactics to make work better based on their observations*
(Sadler, 1989, p. 119)

In other words, if we want to use assessment as a tool for learning, students need to

- Know where they're going
- Know where they are now
- Know how to close the gap

As you'll recall, in Chapter 1 we mentioned that many different decision makers count on the availability of accurate information about student achievement to do their jobs to help students learn. We talked about teachers, students, parents, and district staff. Many of these users of assessment are shown in Table 2.3, categorized by major purpose: assessment *for* or *of* learning. As you look through Table 2.3, what do you notice?

Here's what we notice:

- Inside the classroom, assessment *for* and *of* learning are more balanced. For teachers, students, and parents, assessments *of* learning are not enough. This is especially true if the assessment *of* learning is from a once-a-year standardized test. These kinds of assessments don't provide the day-to-day information needed in the classroom. Yet much of our national assessment energy is expended on once-a-year tests.
- Those outside the classroom make almost purely assessment *of* learning decisions, many of which can be made from a once-a-year standardized test.
- Although assessment *of* learning is important, it is not sufficient. Once-a-year assessment meets only the needs of some of those who use assessment information. If the needs of all decision makers are not met, we are out of balance in our assessment systems.

Table 2.3 Purposes for (Users and Uses of) Assessment

Assessment User	Assessment for Learning	Assessment of Learning
Students	<p>Am I improving over time?</p> <p>Do I know what it means to succeed?</p> <p>What should I do next?</p> <p>What help do I need?</p>	<p>Am I succeeding at the level that I should be?</p> <p>Am I capable of success?</p> <p>How am I doing in relationship to my classmates?</p> <p>Is the learning worth the effort?</p>
Teachers	<p>What does this student need?</p> <p>What do these students need?</p> <p>What are student strengths to build on?</p> <p>How should I group my students?</p> <p>Am I going too fast? Too slow? Too far? Not far enough?</p>	<p>What grade do I put on the report card?</p> <p>What students need to be referred for special service?</p> <p>What will I tell parents?</p>
Parents	<p>What can we do at home to support learning?</p> <p>Is my child learning new things?</p>	<p>Is my child keeping up?</p> <p>Is this teacher doing a good job?</p> <p>Is this a good school? District?</p>
Principal		<p>Is instruction producing results?</p> <p>Are our students ready for the workplace or the next step in learning?</p> <p>How shall we allocate building resources to achieve success?</p>
Superintendent		<p>Are our programs of instruction producing desired results?</p> <p>Is each building producing results?</p> <p>Which schools need additional resources?</p> <p>How shall we allocate district resources to achieve success?</p>

Table 2.3 (Continued)

Assessment User	Assessment <i>for</i> Learning	Assessment <i>of</i> Learning
State Department of Education		<p>Are programs across the state producing results?</p> <p>Are individual districts producing results?</p> <p>Who is making adequate yearly progress and is not?</p> <p>How shall we allocate district resources to achieve success?</p>
Citizens		<p>Are our students achieving in ways that prepare them to become productive workers and citizens?</p>

Source: Adapted from *Student-Involved Assessment for Learning*, 4th ed. (p. 22), by R. J. Stiggins, 2005, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. Copyright © 2005 by Pearson Education, Inc. Adapted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc.

- Students are very important users of assessment information, making critical decisions about themselves as learners. These decisions can have important motivational consequences.
- Individuals make very important decisions about students based on assessment information. Therefore, all our assessments—standardized as well as classroom; assessments *of* learning as well as assessments *for* learning—must be of high quality, yielding accurate results.

You might be thinking assessment *for* and *of* learning sound like formative and summative assessment. If you are, you are correct. Assessment *for* learning is also called “formative” assessment. Assessment *of* learning is also called “summative” assessment. We use here the words *for* and *of* because they are more sprightly and catchy. But, more importantly, the term *assessment for learning* has a broader meaning than formative assessment. The traditional way to think of formative uses of assessment is teachers assessing frequently and using the results to plan the next steps in instruction. Assessment *for* learning goes beyond that. It involves teachers providing descriptive rather than evaluative feedback to students. It also includes students—from clarifying targets to self-assessing to communicating with others about their own progress. It’s this descriptive feedback

and student-involvement aspect of assessment *for* learning that results in the remarkable achievement gains we'll describe in the next section.

If you like the terms “formative” and “summative” better, use them. Just remember to add *descriptive feedback to students* and *student involvement in assessment* to the formative side. For simplicity's sake, we'll occasionally use the words “formative” and “summative.” When we do, we mean “formative” in its broadest sense.

Why the Distinction Is Important

And now the kicker: As it turns out, the distinction between assessment *for* and *of* learning is pivotal to understanding the most effective uses of assessment in the classroom.

Impact of Assessment *for* Learning

Research evidence gathered around the world shows what happens to student achievement when the principles of assessment *for* learning permeate the classroom environment. Dozens of studies conducted at all levels of instruction offer evidence of strong achievement gains in student performance as measured by standardized tests (Bloom, 1984; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black, 2003; Meisels, Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Bickel, & Hon, 2003; Rodriguez, 2004). The effect of assessment *for* learning on student achievement is some four to five times greater than the effect of reduced class size (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willms, 2001). Few interventions in education come close to having the same level of impact as assessment *for* learning.

But the most intriguing result is that, while all students show achievement gains, the largest gains accrue to the lowest achievers. Everyone wins, with those who have the most to win, winning the most.

We're used to thinking about assessment as the measurer of impact of instructional interventions; we implement a new program or teaching strategy and then use assessment to see how effective it was. *In the case of assessment for learning, assessment becomes not only the measurer of impact, but also the innovation that causes change in student achievement*; assessment is not just the index of change, it is the change.

Black and Wiliam (1998) identify the classroom assessment features that bring about these large achievement gains:

- Assessments that result in accurate information
- Descriptive rather than evaluative feedback to students
- Student involvement in assessment

And so, as you might guess, these are the assessment practices we emphasize in this book. *Accuracy + descriptive feedback + student involvement = achievement gains.*

Assessment and Student Motivation

The reason assessment *for* learning practices yield large achievement gains can best be explained by examining their critical link to student motivation.

How do we use assessment to help students *want* to learn? Our traditional way has been to use assessments *of* learning (for example, grades) to reward behavior we feel leads to learning—doing homework and getting it in on time, preparing for class discussions, participating in class discussions, trying hard, and so on—and punish behavior we feel doesn't lead to learning—not doing homework or getting it in on time, not being prepared for class, not participating in class discussions, not trying. We have factored behavior into grades to motivate students to act in academically responsible ways.

Reflect for a moment on this procedure. Can you identify students for whom promising As and threatening Fs works? It causes them to work hard, get assignments in on time, and learn well? Of course you can. By the same token, can you identify students who are impervious to the threat of failure? For whom grades have ceased to be a motivator at all? Again, you may know one or many such students. Our traditional ways of using assessment to motivate students to want to keep trying—the rewards and punishments of grades—often don't work as we hope they will.

Recent thinking reconfigures ways in which assessment can motivate students to want to learn. According to those who study the human brain (see, for example, Caine & Caine, 1997; Jensen, 1998), we all have an innate desire to learn; we are born with intrinsic motivation. Learning is required for survival. The brain is built to seek information, integrate it with other information, interpret it, remember it, and bring it to bear at the appropriate

times. According to these researchers, this intrinsic motivation to learn is supported when the learner meets the following criteria:

- Has a sense of control and choice
- Gets frequent and specific feedback on performance
- Encounters tasks that are challenging, but not threatening
- Is able to self-assess accurately
- Encounters learning tasks related to everyday life

The following conditions tend to drive out intrinsic motivation:

- Coercion
- Intimidation
- Rewards or punishments linked to evaluative judgments
- Comparing one student to another
- Infrequent or vague feedback
- Limitation of personal control
- Responsibility without authority

We seek out learning situations where the items in the first list are true, and avoid learning situations where those in the second list occur.

So, what do you think? Does our traditional use of assessment and grading set up learning environments more like list 1 or list 2?

We believe that traditional assessment procedures look like list 2—in our current system, assessments and grades are used to engineer compliance, deliver evaluative feedback (grades, which many students receive as a judgment of themselves and their worth as people), and compare students to each other (engendering negative competition and thus reinforcing a judgment of self-worth). Students also receive single grades on work without indication of what they did well or what might be their next steps in learning (reducing student control), and feedback pointing out only what they can't do yet instead of describing what they can do (emphasizing negatives instead of positives). Students are thus responsible for work but do not have the knowledge they need to improve.

The Research on Feedback

Black and Wiliam (1998) and other motivational research (Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Butler, 1988; Dweck, 2001; Sadler, 1989) clearly show that the type of feedback given to students affects their motivation to learn:

- It's the *quality* of the feedback rather than its existence or absence that determines its power. Specifically what makes the difference is the use of *descriptive, criterion-based* feedback as opposed to numerical scoring or letter grades.
- Feedback *emphasizing that it's the learning that's important* leads to greater learning than feedback *implying that what is important is looking good or how you compare to others*.
- Descriptive feedback can *focus on strengths or weaknesses*; feedback is most effective when it points out strengths in the work as well as areas needing improvement.

The Goal with Assessment for Learning

Assessment *for* learning practices use what is known about how the brain works, how we learn, and how we are motivated to maximize learning. Sadler's (1989) set of three requirements—students know where they are going, where they are now, and how to close the gap between the two—establishes the conditions for students to feel in control of their environment. Under these circumstances students can be challenged without being threatened.

For example, we have a colleague who was teaching a class for teachers on portfolios. A special education teacher in this class wanted to try student self-assessment in writing, but she was afraid that if students actually knew how low they were performing it would damage their self-concepts and cause them to give up. The instructor convinced her to try it anyway. She had her students keep selected samples of writing in a folder, learning to assess it accurately using a well-known writing scoring guide and describing their progress over time.

She reported that her students scored themselves very low at the beginning using the scoring guide—mostly “1s”. However, at the end, they were higher, giving themselves more “2s.” She also reported that far from being discouraged, her students were very excited because for the first time in their school lives they felt they understood the conditions of their success—they knew that they had made progress, they knew why they made

progress, and they knew what they had to do next to improve their writing (L. Paulson, personal communication, September 1985).

The teacher succeeded because students learned how to take control over their own learning, received frequent and descriptive feedback on progress, were challenged without being threatened, and engaged in self-assessment. According to Sadler, the students knew where they were going, they knew where they were at any given time, and they learned what to do to close the gap.

Classroom assessments sometimes slip into deficit mode: the assessment shows students only what they don't know yet or what they need to work on. When we attend to the motivational effects assessment can have, we use it to show students both what they *have* learned and what they need to learn next. Students are where they are. The shift in type of feedback neither changes their level of achievement nor masks it.

DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

Activity 2.2 Assessment, Achievement, and Motivation

Pause a moment and reconsider one of the classroom examples described in Chapter 1—Emily's writing, Krissy's paper, or Mr. Heim's science class. Go to the accompanying DVD segment entitled "Impact of Student-Involved Assessment" for clips of students and teachers discussing the impact of assessment *for* learning on achievement and motivation. How do their comments compare to your observations about productive connections between assessment and motivation?

What Does Assessment *for* Learning Look Like?

Assessment *for* learning is an interplay between teacher and student. Students are active, not just as test takers, but in thinking about their learning. We all want students to engage in and take active responsibility for their learning, and we can take specific steps to help students answer assessment *for* learning's three questions: (1) "Where am I going?"; (2) "Where am I now?"; and (3) "How can I close the gap?" We call these steps the "Seven Strategies of Assessment *for* Learning." Together, they comprise an organizing framework for assessment *for* learning in the classroom. We explain the strategies briefly here and

then go into depth with each in the chapters that follow. The Seven Strategies are shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Seven Strategies of Assessment *for Learning*

Where am I going?

1. Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
2. Use examples and models of strong and weak work.

Where am I now?

3. Offer regular descriptive feedback.
4. Teach students to self-assess and set goals.

How can I close the gap?

5. Design lessons to focus on one aspect of quality at a time.
6. Teach students focused revision.
7. Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of and share their learning.

Where Am I Going?

Strategy 1: Provide a Clear and Understandable Vision of the Learning Target

Share with your students the learning target(s), objective(s), or goal(s) in advance of teaching the lesson, giving the assignment, or doing the activity. Use language students understand, and check to make sure they understand. Ask, “Why are we doing this activity? What are we learning?” Convert learning targets into student-friendly language by defining key words in terms students understand. Ask students what they think constitutes quality

in a product or performance learning target, then show how their thoughts match with the scoring guide or rubric you will use to define quality. Provide students with scoring guides written so they can understand them. Develop scoring criteria with them.

Strategy 2: Use Examples and Models of Strong and Weak Work

Use models of strong and weak work—anonymous student work, work from life beyond school, and your own work. Begin with work that demonstrates strengths and weaknesses related to problems students commonly experience, especially the problems that most concern you. Ask students to analyze these samples for quality and then to justify their judgments. Use *only* anonymous work. If you have been engaging students in analyzing examples or models, they will be developing a vision of what the product or performance looks like when it's done well.

Model creating a product or performance yourself. Show students the true beginnings, the problems you run into, and how you think through decisions along the way. Don't hide the development and revision part, or students will think they are doing it wrong when it is messy for them at the beginning, and they won't know how to work through the rough patches.

Where Am I Now?

Strategy 3: Offer Regular Descriptive Feedback

Offer descriptive feedback instead of grades on work that is for practice. Descriptive feedback should reflect student strengths and weaknesses with respect to the specific learning target(s) they are trying to hit in a given assignment. Feedback is most effective when it identifies what students are doing right, as well as what they need to work on next. One way to think of this is “stars and stairs”—What did the learner accomplish? What are the next steps? All learners, especially struggling ones, need to know that they did something right, and our job as teachers is to find it and label it for them, before launching into what they need to improve.

Remember that learners don't need to know everything that needs correcting, all at once. Narrow your comments to the specific knowledge and skills emphasized in the current assignment and pay attention to how much feedback learners can act on at one time. Don't worry that students will be harmed if you don't point out all of their problems. Identify as many issues as students can successfully act on at one time, independently, and then figure out what to teach next based on the other problems in their work.

Providing students with descriptive feedback is a crucial part of increasing achievement. Feedback helps students answer the question, “Where am I now?” with respect to “Where do I need to be?” You are also modeling the kind of thinking you want students to engage in when they self-assess.

Strategy 4: Teach Students to Self-Assess and Set Goals

Teaching students to self-assess and set goals for learning is the second half of helping students answer the question, “Where am I now?” Self-assessment is a necessary part of learning, not an add-on that we do if we have the time or the “right” students. Struggling students *are* the right students, as much as any others. The research described previously tells us it is they who gain the most. Self-assessment includes having students do the following:

- Identify their own strengths and areas for improvement. You can ask them to do this before they show their work to you for feedback, giving them prior thoughts of their own to “hang” it on—your feedback will be more meaningful and will make more sense.
- Write in a response log at the end of class, recording key points they have learned and questions they still have.
- Using established criteria, select a work sample for their portfolio that proves a certain level of proficiency, explaining why the piece qualifies.
- Offer descriptive feedback to classmates.
- Use your feedback, feedback from other students, or their own self-assessment to identify what they need to work on and set goals for future learning.

How Can I Close the Gap?

Strategy 5: Design Lessons to Focus on One Aspect of Quality at a Time

If you are working on a learning target having more than one aspect of quality, we recommend that you build competence one block at a time. For example, mathematics problem solving requires choosing the right strategy as one component. A science experiment lab report requires a statement of the hypothesis as one component. Writing requires an introduction as one component. Look at the components of quality and then teach them one part at a time, making sure that students understand that all of the parts ultimately must come together. You can then offer feedback focused on the component you just taught, which narrows the volume of feedback students need to act on at a given time and raises

their chances of success in doing so, again, especially for struggling learners. This is a time saver for you, and more instructionally powerful for students.

Strategy 6: Teach Students Focused Revision

Show students how you would revise an answer, product, or performance, and then let them revise a similar example. Begin by choosing work that needs revision on a single aspect of quality. Ask students to brainstorm advice for the (anonymous) author on how to improve the work. Then ask students, in pairs, to revise the work using their own advice. Or ask students to write a letter to the creator of the sample, suggesting how to make it stronger for the aspect of quality discussed. Ask students to analyze your own work for quality and make suggestions for improvement. Revise your work using their advice. Ask them to again review it for quality. These exercises will prepare students to work on a current product or performance of their own, revising for the aspect of quality being studied. You can then give feedback on just that aspect.

Strategy 7: Engage Students in Self-Reflection, and Let Them Keep Track of and Share Their Learning

Engage students in tracking, reflecting on, and communicating about their own progress. Any activity that requires students to reflect on what they are learning and to share their progress both reinforces the learning and helps them develop insights into themselves as learners. These kinds of activities give students the opportunity to notice their own strengths, to see how far they have come, and to feel in control of the conditions of their success. By reflecting on their learning, they deepen their understanding, and will remember it longer. In addition, it is the learner, not the teacher, who is doing the work.

Here are some things you can have students do:

- Write a process paper, detailing how they solved a problem or created a product or performance. This analysis encourages them to think like professionals in your discipline.
- Write a letter to their parents about a piece of work, explaining where they are now with it and what they are trying to do next.
- Reflect on their growth. "I have become a better reader this year. I used to . . . , but now I . . . "
- Help plan and participate in conferences with parents and/or teachers to share their learning.

These Strategies as a Progression

The strategies reflect a progression that unfolds in the classroom over time. Students have trouble engaging in later steps (such as self-assessment) if they have not had experience with earlier steps (understanding learning targets and reliably assessing work). Likewise, it is much harder for students to communicate their progress if the learning targets are not clear, if they are not adept at assessing their work, and if they don't know what they need to do to improve.

All assessment *for* learning ideas in the rest of this book will go into the seven strategies in detail. Each application will address one or more of the three questions: *Where am I going?* *Where am I now?* and *How can I close the gap?*

Summary

In this chapter we have elaborated the differences and similarities between assessment *for* and *of* learning, cited the research linking assessment *for* learning to higher student motivation and achievement, and provided an overview of how to implement assessment *for* learning in the classroom.

Assessment *of* learning occurs to sum up achievement at a particular point in time. It occurs after learning has happened. Assessment *for* learning occurs to regularly inform teachers and students about the progress of learning while that learning is taking place. Its purpose is to improve learning while there is still time to act—before the graded event.

Assessment *for* learning can have a major motivational and achievement impact on students. It enables students to take control of their own learning by providing a clear vision of the learning targets they are to attain, teaching them to assess where they are with respect to the target, and offering strategies they can use to close the gap between where they are and where they need to be. The research on motivation, how we learn, and feedback come together to support assessment *for* learning as the best use of assessment in the service of student learning and well-being.